

Testimony of South Farms Nursery School

Annette DiMauro, Director

Before the Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee

Thank you in advance for the opportunity to listen to my concerns regarding our dollar cut to the Office of Early Childhood for School Readiness. My name is Annette Di Mauro I am an Early Childhood Educator and the Director of a local pre-school program in Middletown, a program that has been funded with SR dollars since 1998. We currently serve 18 children; 18 children whom are all utilizing School Readiness slots, with a waiting list of more then we can serve. I am writing to powerfully advocate that every child should have the opportunity to participate in a high-quality early childhood education program that will prepare them to succeed in school, life, and our society.

Advocating for early childhood education is a subject we feel strongly about. We can and should provide this for all students, especially students from disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds. As we strive to close the achievement gap and protect every child's right to learn, early childhood education is one of our most powerful tools. Long research shows that low-income children who participate in high- quality early childhood education programs are far less likely to be retained a grade, be placed in special education classes, or drop out of high school, saving money in the long run.

Research continues to confirm the benefits of quality early childhood programs, some examples are; Two studies published in *Journal of Developmental Psychology* documenting the benefits of Universal Pre-K programs (serving four-year-olds) and Early Head Start programs (serving infants, toddlers, and their families) on children's cognitive and language development, especially for children from low-income families. The Pre-K study in Oklahoma found significant improvements in students' reading, writing, and spelling abilities. While the Early Head Start Study showed gains in children's social and emotional development and health as well as enhanced family support for children's learning.

In addition, researchers also made a point of noting that the preschool program was staffed by well-educated, well-trained teachers who earn low wages and or salaries below their abilities. At this time in order to pay teachers an adequate salary which for a BA degree we feel is \$25 per hour, we would need to collect approximately \$16,000 per year per child; but in reality we are only collecting an average of \$12,000 per year and that fluctuates each year depending upon the parent fee contribution, and Care4Kids. With that said, we oppose the 12 million dollar cut to the Office of Early Childhood, and also oppose the block grant approach being proposed by the Governor as it removes transparency from the State budget, and leaves our business in the dark as to how to proceed in serving our children and families. We work on shoe string budgets now, meeting unfunded State licensing mandates, NAEYC mandates and School Readiness

mandates. Our teachers are working at or below the poverty level, many of whom hold BA degree's with large college loans, but need State assistance to survive.

In closing, please protect the Quality Enhancement funding that is given to the Middletown community. The funds provide 10 free trainings per year which helps our teachers obtain the mandated 20 hours of professional development (again an unfunded mandate). These funds also help to provide onsite coaching for teachers and the program at large surrounding the mandates, learning experience plans, and general early childhood best practices. These services are invaluable and we can't duplicate them on our already under funded budget. We are proud of what we are able to provide for children and families, please do not take that away from us! Please do not put us in the position where we need to close a classroom(s), layoff teachers, and worst of all leaving families without access to child care for their children, thus leaving them no choice by to lose their job!

We invite you to come and visit our program, see our dedicated work in action. If you are interested, please give me a call as I would be happy to set something up with you.

Sincerely,

Annette DiMauro Md. Ed
Early Childhood Educator, Program Director
South Farms Nursery School
261 Ridge Road
Middletown, CT 06457
860-344-1179
southfarmsnurseryschool@gmail.com

Sources:

- 1) National Education Association: *Research on Early Childhood Education*;
<http://www.nea.org/home/18226.htm>
- 2) *The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development* (2005)
<http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/dev-416872.pdf>
- 3) *The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development*. Gormley Jr., William T.; Gayer, Ted; Phillips, Deborah; Dawson, Brittany *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 41(6), Nov 2005, 872-884. <http://204.14.132.173/pubs/journals/releases/dev-416872.pdf>
Special Section: Developmental Psychology and Public Policy. PsycARTICLES Journal Article